

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE UPDATE

August 23, 2002

President Bush has locked up the funding that the U. S. Congress provided in the supplemental appropriations bill for 2002. This bill allocated \$15 million to APHIS for TSE work and \$2 million to ARS for TSE research. The President stated that the overall 5.1 billion included in the bill contained too many “pork barrel” projects and he had to release all or none of it. The President did assure Governor McCallum of Wisconsin that the Federal Government would be providing assistance this fall for all states CWD efforts.

South Dakota has announced the finding of CWD in a captive elk in Custer County. This elk was a three year old bull which was born on the facility. Its mother had been tested in December of 2000 and did not test positive. This facility was adjacent to a facility that had been depopulated in 1997 due to CWD. The two facilities shared a common fence which the State Veterinarian's office calls a double fence. However, the “second fence” was a single strand of electric wire. The facility had been conducting CWD monitoring for 52 months with no positives until this one. The herd with the new positive had been quarantined for 4 years due to possible exposure from the neighboring facility with no animals being moved into or out-of this herd.

At the recent Midwest Deer and Turkey Study Group meeting in Missouri, the Midwest States reported on plans to collect and sample a total of 96,000 deer during the fall of 2002 hunting seasons. This large number requires an upward adjustment of the total nationwide estimate to approximately 225,000 samples being collected this fall.

Modeling of Chronic Wasting Disease by the University of Wisconsin has confirmed earlier modeling conducted by the Colorado Division of Wildlife that predicts a deer die-off is strong and aggressive management actions are not taken. The Wisconsin model predicts the loss of the deer herd in their endemic area in 20-25 years, much quicker than the 50-75 years predicted in the Colorado model. The difference can be accounted for by the fact that Wisconsin is dealing with a more sociable species (white-tail deer) and a higher density (50+ deer per sq. mile) while Colorado is dealing with mule deer and fewer than 10 per square mile. In either case, doing nothing will insure the local extinction of the deer herd.

The Province of Manitoba has banned baiting and feeding of cervids for hunting purposes. The province has also banned the import of any cervid killed in any other province, territory or country without first removing the head, hide, hooves, mammary glands, entrails, internal organs and spinal column. Antlers and their connecting bone plate are allowed if the plate is disinfected and all other hide and tissue removed. Capes can be imported but must be immediately chemically processed into a tanned product. Under the new regulations, it is illegal to possess a substance that contains the urine, feces, saliva or scent glands of any cervid also.

The Government of the Province of Alberta has decided to continue its ban on the operation of captive cervid “hunt farms” in spite of heavy pressure from the captive industry to allow them. In announcing the decision, Alberta Premier Ralph Klein stated, “I think it's abhorrent to take what are now deemed to be essentially wild animals and have them penned up, and have them available to be shot by hunters who don't want to take the time and effort to go out into the wild and experience the great outdoors and the challenge of hunting, I look on it as a decision that was based on common sense.”

Colorado hunters have purchased a record number of hunting permits, including permits in the CWD endemic area. Unsold big game licenses went on sale on Tuesday, August 20 and the Division sold a record 11,653 permits for deer and elk, a new record for license sales in a single day. This follows a record number of permits sold through the application process, which reached 430,000 before the deadline. This is over 39,000 more permits than sold last year, in spite of the media hype on CWD and fears that hunters would not turn out due to press coverage of the hypothetical CWD/Human health link.

The organized elk breeders in Saskatchewan have demanded that the provincial government provide interest free loans for feeding their animals. The specter of CWD, combined with a serious drought have left the breeders with nothing to feed their animals in the pens where they are kept and they are now looking for a government bailout. They are also pushing the government to pressure South Korea to re-open its borders to Canadian elk products. In 1999, an elk exported to South Korea from Canada tested positive for CWD, making South Korea the only non North American country to have confirmed CWD in cervids. Earlier in the month, some Saskatchewan elk farmers threatened to open the gates and release their animals if the government did not bail them out.